

Education Cluster Advocacy Brief – COVID 19 Response



The COVID-19 pandemic is having a very significant impact on education system and on the wellbeing and learning of children and young people in the State of Palestine. In Palestine, containment measures have included the closure of schools since 6 March, with the Ministry putting in place a number of measures to support distance learning.

The closures include 3,037 schools, of which, 2,300 are in the West Bank and 737 are in Gaza, along with 2,017 kindergartens (KG). A total of 1,430,000 children are affected, 57 per cent of whom are in the West Bank and 43 per cent in Gaza.

Meanwhile, safe access to quality education provides a sense of predictability and routine for children, and education plays an essential role in emergencies. We need to acknowledge that the longer children are unable to attend school, the more likely it is they will never return, particularly adolescent girls and boys and those from low-income households. In Palestine, where education is all too often disrupted by conflict, is fraught with violence due to proximity of military or Israeli settlers, is scary to access because of checkpoints, or impossible to access because of distance and disability or poverty, the COVID-19 crisis presents an opportunity to develop and deliver a quality distance learning to ensure continuity of the educational process, to protect public health and disseminate lifesaving messages, and promote the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of children, parents and teachers.

The Education Cluster is working closely with the Ministry of Education (MoE) to ensure safe and inclusive access to emergency distance learning, with psychosocial support and social emotional learning components during and after the COVID-19 crisis. The cluster is also supporting the MoE to ensure that schools are safe for children and school staff upon reopening, in line with the global guidance for COVID- 19 prevention and control in schools developed jointly by UNICEF and WHO. As the MoE is moving ahead to conduct 12th grade exams starting 30 May, the Education Cluster will work with the MoE to ensure the protection of students whilst sitting the exams. This should include opening more examination centres to reduce number of students per centre and applying all other relevant infection control measures for school environments recommended by WHO and UNICEF.

The Education Cluster is concerned with the low levels of funding allocated to the Education COVID 19 response. As of today, only US\$2.3 million out of US\$5.1 million requested for the first 3 months of the response has been received, and 88 per cent of this funding is channeled through Education Cannot Wait. The Cluster is also concerned with the limited coordination between MoE in Ramallah and the MoE in Gaza, despite efforts by the cluster lead agencies to harmonize the response and foster technical dialogue between the two parts of the Ministry. This is particularly important on issues related to distance learning, twelfth grade examination administration and needs, and provision of Mental Health and Psychosocial support (MHPSS).

The Education Cluster calls:

- That donor governments allocate flexible funding to education response activities, recognizing that this crisis will be unpredictable and investment in the recovery phase that starts with the re-opening of schools.
- Donors need to provide longer term investment to support the MoE to develop alternative forms of distance education and increase accessibility to technology for the most vulnerable children, especially children with disabilities and children from poor socioeconomic backgrounds to ensure equitable access to inclusive learning opportunities.
- Donor support for the advocacy efforts of the Cluster and its lead agencies on improving the coordination between MoE Ramallah and MoE Gaza is required.
- Advocacy by donors with the Israeli authorities that understandings are in place to reduce the proximity of Israeli military actors from Palestinian schools while students are sitting the twelve grade exams, and to facilitate access of students, teachers, and school personnel through checkpoints on their way to and from testing centers.

On East Jerusalem:

- Advocacy by donors aimed at the Israeli authorities to facilitate the administration of the twelve grade exams in East Jerusalem and ensure protection of students of municipal and private schools while sitting the exams is urgently needed.
- Advocacy by donors with the Israeli authorities to ensure that all schools under their supervision in East Jerusalem, especially recognized unofficial schools, are well prepared prior to reopening with adequate infection control measures in alignment with UNICEF and WHO global guidelines for “COVID-19 Prevention and Control in Schools” is required.

